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C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 000314

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SUBJECT: AIT CHAIRMAN BURGHARDT'S MARCH 18 MEETING WITH MAC
CHAIR LAI SHIN-YUAN

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director Robert S. Wang,
Reasons: 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Chairman Burghardt opened his March 18 meeting with Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) by expressing the good will of the incoming Obama administration and emphasizing U.S. support and satisfaction with the pace and substance of cross-Straits talks. MAC's ultimate goal and responsibility is to see peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, Lai stressed. To this end, the MAC must maintain the status quo for as long as possible to ensure all contentious issues can be discussed and resolved. Thus, MAC is engaged in coordinating cross-Straits negotiations and researching possible future areas of common interest so it can provide policy recommendations to the President. Furthermore, as Taiwan's Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) are only implementers in the process, it is MAC's duty to provide substance to the negotiations to ensure Taiwan's equities, such as sovereignty and economic interests, are addressed, stated the Chairperson.

¶2. (C) Tracking public opinion on cross-Straits issues is one of MAC's main tasks, Lai explained. Specifically, MAC conducts a poll every three months asking about cross-Straits issues. Among other questions, these polls have consistently asked respondents about their views on Taiwan's political status. The latent results indicate strong public support for maintaining the status quo in political relations with China (91.8%). Nineteen percent of those polled support eventual independence, with a slightly lower number supporting eventual unification. Only 2% of the respondents support immediate independence, she noted. Lai also commented that, since last fall, polls have registered low-level general concern among respondents that cross-Straits talks are moving too fast, but this has slightly increased. When asked what specific aspect of the relationship is of concern, people mentioned "sovereignty." She noted, however, that those polled generally are unable to pinpoint how cross-Straits agreements have, in fact, infringed on Taiwan's sovereignty. Therefore, in MAC's view, anxiety over cross-Straits talks has been generated not by concrete issues but by the opposition party and certain media outlets for partisan political reasons and it is MAC's job to help change this perception by doing public outreach.

¶3. (U) Chairperson Lai was accompanied by MAC Director General James Shi Chu and MAC notetaker. Chairman Burghardt

was accompanied by the Deputy Director, EAP/TC Director Ted Mann, AIT PolOffs Angelo Chang (notetaker) and Deanna Kim.

¶4. (U) Chairman Burghardt did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

YOUNG